

Syllabus: LING-GA 3340-002

Experimental Semantics and Pragmatics

New York University, Fall 2017

Up to date as of November 8, 2017

Course

Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:55PM-6:10PM
Room 103, Department of Linguistics, 10 Washington Place

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Course description

This seminar is on experimental methods in semantics and pragmatics. We will cover a variety of test populations including both children and adults. Topics include modals, counterfactuals, scalar implicatures, embedded definites, nominal recursion, inverse scope, questions under discussion, and evidentiality. Students will encounter methods such as truth value judgments in context, preference tasks, elicited production, acceptability ratings, and coloring-in tasks. After motivating the use of experiments in semantics, we will cover best practices in experimental design and writing as well as basic statistics. Within the first six weeks of the seminar, students will design, execute, and write up a simple experimental study using Amazon Mechanical Turk. A more extensive research project will be developed and carried throughout the rest of the course and the January term. Students will submit and review mini-grant proposals motivating their studies.

Prerequisites

LING-GA 1340 (Semantics I) or permission of instructors

Workload and grade calculation

20% Short project. This project consists of designing and executing a simple hypothesis-driven study on Amazon Mechanical Turk, analyzing the results using basic statistical methods, and presenting them in a 500-word abstract in IMRD format with data and references on a second page.

5% Short project abstract review. Students will review a small number of each other's abstracts.

20% Grant proposal. For their final project, students may either use Mechanical Turk again or another recruitment system, including by hand with live participants. Before executing the project, students must submit a grant proposal, which must describe an interesting problem, formulated as a clear hypothesis and linked to relevant previous literature. The proposal must also include appropriate methods for testing this hypothesis. If relevant, a budget must also be submitted.

5% Grant proposal review. Students will review a small number of each other's grant proposals.

0% In-class presentation of the final project. Once approval and funding have been secured :-), students will be given the opportunity to present their project in class. This will not be graded and students are free to use their allotted time in whatever way is helpful to their project (e.g. running questionnaires).

50% Deliverable. The final project consists of executing the study proposed in the grant; analyzing the results using appropriate statistical methods; presenting them in IMRD format as a brief paper (maximum 15 pages plus references and figures); and including the collected data in machine-readable format. The project must take into consideration the feedback obtained from peer reviews and presentation, and the deliverable must include a response to the peer reviews.

Group work

Short projects on Amazon Mechanical Turk will be carried out and written up in groups of 2-3 students, and graded accordingly.

Grant proposals, final project presentations, and deliverables should all be about the same project (not necessarily the same as the short projects). They may be carried out individually or in a group of 2-3 students, and will be graded accordingly.

All peer reviewing will be done individually and through NYUClasses. Each group should designate one member who will submit the group work. Reviewers should skip any projects to them that come from their own group. Students should enter the highest numerical grade (100 points) when asked; the actual grades will be assigned by us.

Policies and other remarks

Deadlines are listed on the last page of this syllabus. The final papers will be due on February 1st. We will read, grade, and give feedback on them by February 14th. Late submissions will be accepted but will be penalized by reducing the class grade by 2 percentage points per week, and will result in delayed feedback. **Your letter grade** for the class will be assigned on the following scale.

A	95–100%	B	83–86%	C	73–76%	D	63–66%
A–	90–94%	B–	80–82%	C–	70–72%	F	0–62%
B+	87–89%	C+	77–79%	D+	67–69%		

Fractional grades will be truncated down to the nearest integer (e.g. 94.7 is truncated to 94).

All participants are expected to do the assigned reading and to participate in the discussion of the material in class. If you are unable to attend a class you must let the instructors know in advance as soon as possible.

Auditors are welcome, as are students from other departments, schools, and universities. Auditors may join either for individual sessions or for the whole course. If you would like to take this course or if you are planning to audit it, please send a short email to the instructors. Please include your NYU netID (if you have one) to be added to the course mailing list and to get access to the course materials.

Auditors do not have to complete any group work; but if they do, they are expected to commit to carrying their fair share of the work in a group, as if they were registered for credit, out of respect for their team members. Auditors may choose to join a group for the short project only, or for both the short project and for the grant proposal / final project. Auditors who submit work for peer review must also take part in the peer review.

Software used for the course

We will use Amazon Mechanical Turk and the software package *turktools* by Michael Yoshitaka Erlewine and Hadas Kotek. This requires Python 2.7. For statistical data analysis, we will not use a specific package in class, but we do recommend R.

Peer review guidelines

The typical abstract review will be between 1/2 and 1 page single-spaced. You should assess the abstract along the following dimensions: Empirical quality and technical competence; quality of prose, clarity of presentation; contextualization of research; originality and results.

Please be frank but courteous. Your criticism should be constructive, and your review should provide appropriate rationales both for your positive and for your critical comments.

Your review will be especially helpful to the author if it summarizes the big question and the main insights of the abstract and if it makes suggestions for further research.

The system will ask you to submit a number grade. Please enter 100. No need to come up with a numerical score.

Schedule

Week	Date	Leading	Topics
1	Sep 6	both	Organizational issues, IRB, Cayuse, bird's eye view
2	Sep 11 Sep 13	AC LC	Why experimental semantics? (Ailís on her acquisition work) Why experimental semantics? (Lucas on counterfactual experiment)
3	Sep 18 Sep 20	AC LC	Questions and Hypotheses, Experimental Design Designing an Amazon Mechanical Turk judgment task study
4	Sep 25 Sep 27	AC AC	Basic statistics IMRD writing
5	Oct 2 Oct 4	HK HK	Hadas Kotek: Executing a Mechanical Turk study Hadas Kotek: Executing a Mechanical Turk study
6	(Oct 9) Oct 11	 LC	(no class — Fall Recess) Scalar implicatures
7	Oct 16 Oct 18	AC AC	Scalar implicatures Scalar implicatures (500-word abstracts due before class)
8	Oct 23 Oct 25	LC (LC away)	The rabbit in the hat (abstract reviews due before class) Nominal recursion
9	Oct 30 Nov 1	(LC away) LC	Nominal recursion RSA model
10	Nov 6 Nov 8	LC LC	Inverse scope and QUDs Inverse scope and QUDs
11	Nov 14 Nov 16	AC AC	Musolino 03, Gualmini et al 08 Musolino 03, Gualmini et al 08
12	Nov 20 (Nov 22)	(AC away)	Hacquard 2009, Q/A (grant proposals due before class) (no class — Thanksgiving)
13	Nov 27 Nov 29	AC LC/AC	Aspect and modality in L1A von Fintel and Gillies 2010; Lassiter 2016 (reviews due before class)
14	Dec 4 Dec 6	AC	Evidentiality in modals in L1A in-class office hours
15	Dec 11 Dec 12 Dec 13		in-class office hours project presentations project presentations
16	Feb 1		Deliverable DUE— including paper, responses to reviews, dataset